
Citation:

Flint, SW (2018) In response to 'Are Big Food's corporate social responsibility strategies valuable to communities? A qualitative study with parents and children' by Richards & Phillipson. Public Health Nutrition, 21 (9). pp. 1634-1635. ISSN 1475-2727 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980017004001>

Link to Leeds Beckett Repository record:

<https://eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/id/eprint/4547/>

Document Version:

Article (Accepted Version)

The aim of the Leeds Beckett Repository is to provide open access to our research, as required by funder policies and permitted by publishers and copyright law.

The Leeds Beckett repository holds a wide range of publications, each of which has been checked for copyright and the relevant embargo period has been applied by the Research Services team.

We operate on a standard take-down policy. If you are the author or publisher of an output and you would like it removed from the repository, please [contact us](#) and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

Each thesis in the repository has been cleared where necessary by the author for third party copyright. If you would like a thesis to be removed from the repository or believe there is an issue with copyright, please contact us on openaccess@leedsbeckett.ac.uk and we will investigate on a case-by-case basis.

I read Richards and Phillipson's article entitled 'Are Big Food's corporate social responsibility strategies valuable to communities? A qualitative study with parents and children'¹ with interest, particularly the findings indicating that parents and children question why Big Food companies support health initiatives that seem contrary to the primary aims of their brand, as well as the recognition of companies' 'questionable' strategies targeting the settings of children. It is also of interest that Richards and Phillipson note the lack of Government regulation for the marketing strategies of Big Food companies.

In the UK, the Coca Cola Co. have a truck that visits a variety of locations where teams of representatives give out products from the company to children and adults, and attendees can have their photographs taken with the truck whilst the companies 'Holidays are coming jingle' is played. On the side of the truck is a picture of Santa, a fictional character whose primary appeal is to children aged under 12 years, drinking a bottle of Coca Cola. The Coca-Cola Co. Christmas truck advert, which returned to UK television in 2015, is considered by some of the public as the 'official start of Christmas'.² The Coca-Cola Co. truck tour is a clear violation of the company's own Responsible Marketing Policy. This specifically states, "We will not design our marketing communications in a way that directly appeals to children under 12" – although 'the exception of brand equity characters already in use' is apparently a loophole that allows the use of images of Santa consuming their product.³ Even beyond the use of 'brand equity characters', however, associating their company with Christmas leads to positive attitudes among children towards the company and their products. This is a conditioning strategy to improve brand image which is well known as an effective marketing strategy.⁴

Intervening to prevent the Coca-Cola Co. truck from marketing to children and young people is achievable and aligned not only with the Coca-Cola Co.'s own Responsible Marketing Policy but also with the UK Government's Childhood Obesity: Plan of Action,⁵ which was developed to "monitor action and assess progress, and take action where it is needed". However, my petition to ban the Coca-Cola Co. truck from touring the UK at Christmas time was rejected, with correspondence from the UK Government and Parliament informing me that "It's about something that the UK Government or Parliament is not responsible for".⁶ More recently however, the Public Health England chief executive has been critical of the Coca Cola Co. truck tour the UK commenting "Big-name brands touring the country at Christmas to advertise their most sugary products to children and boost sales does nothing to help families make healthy choices and wider efforts to combat childhood obesity and rotten teeth".⁷

But the Government has a responsibility for the public health; intervening to limit marketing of unhealthy food and drink is within the remit and responsibility of UK Government. By no means is banning the Coca-Cola Co. truck the one and only answer to reducing consumption of high sugar based products. But this is one of many opportunities to intervene, contribute to lowered sugar consumption, moderate the formation of positive attitudes towards unhealthy food and drinks brands and products, and work towards supporting the health of our nation. Collectively and at many different levels, we should take these opportunities to make a stand against unhealthy food and drink brands, particularly where they are targeting young and vulnerable populations as part of their marketing campaigns.

Richards and Phillipson note the lack of evidence supporting 'self-regulation of marketing strategies' and the importance of 'regulation and restriction' of Big Food corporate social responsibility strategies. Regulation to insure corporate compliance with their own Responsible Marketing Policies is no different. The example of the Coca-Cola Co. Christmas truck is a clear call for the UK Government *not* to rely on the Coca-Cola Co.'s 'self-regulation' and to take responsibility to act in line with the public health policies that they have developed.

Author contribution: SF has written the entire article.

Competing interests: SF has no conflicts of interest.

Role of funding source: None

Ethics committee approval: Not applicable.

References

1. Richards Z, Phillipson L. Are Big Food's corporate social responsibility strategies valuable to communities? A qualitative study with parents and children. *Public Health Nutr* 2017;20:3372-3380.
2. Think Money. What marks the start of your Christmas? <https://www.thinkmoney.co.uk/news-advice/what-marks-the-start-of-your-christmas-0-4333-0.htm>; 2014 (last accessed 27th November 2017).
3. The Coca-Cola Co. The Coca-Cola Company's responsible marketing policy, <http://www.coca-colacompany.com/content/dam/journey/us/en/private/fileassets/pdf/2015/10/responsible-marketing-policy-2015.pdf>; 2015 (last accessed 27th November 2017).
4. Flint SW, Peake R. Lead by example: Should sport take a stand against brands of unhealthy consumption? *Public Health* 2016;134:117-119.
5. HM Government. Childhood Obesity: A Plan of Action. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/546588/Childhood_obesity_2016__2__acc.pdf; 2016 (last accessed 27th November 2017).
6. Petitions. UK Government & Parliament. Ban the Coca Cola truck from visiting the UK: time to get serious! <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/171585>; 2016 (last accessed 27th November 2017).
7. Campbell D. Calls for ban on Coca-Cola's Christmas truck tour over child health fear. *The Guardian*. <https://amp.theguardian.com/business/2017/nov/29/coca-cola-christmas-truck-tour-criticised-obesity-tooth-decay>; 2017 (last accessed 1st December 2017).